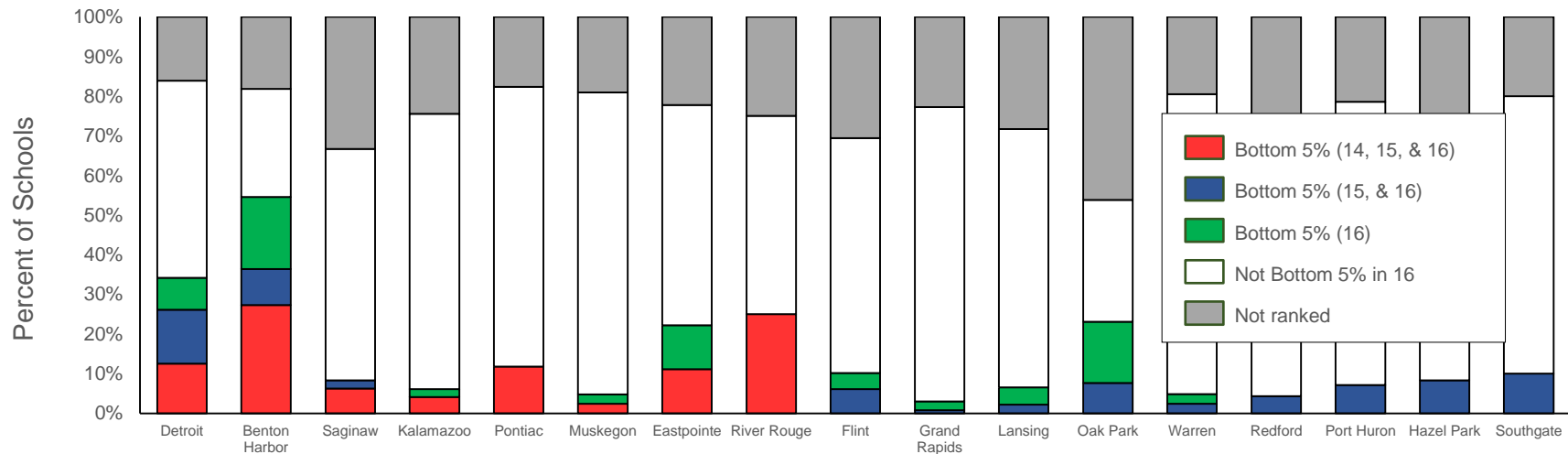# A Case for Empowerment and Innovation in Michigan

Current challenges in Michigan, a framework for accountability and best practice innovation zones, and guiding principles for future legislation, policies, and practices

School Closure Challenges

An overview of the challenges faced by schools across Michigan

There are currently 8 cities with schools in the Bottom 5% for three years in a row and potentially more to follow in coming years.

Currently, there are 38 schools that face potential closure pursuant to MCL 380.1280c ("1280c") and legislation specific to community districts, MCL 380.391. Left unchanged, an additional 40 schools may face the same threat of closure next year.
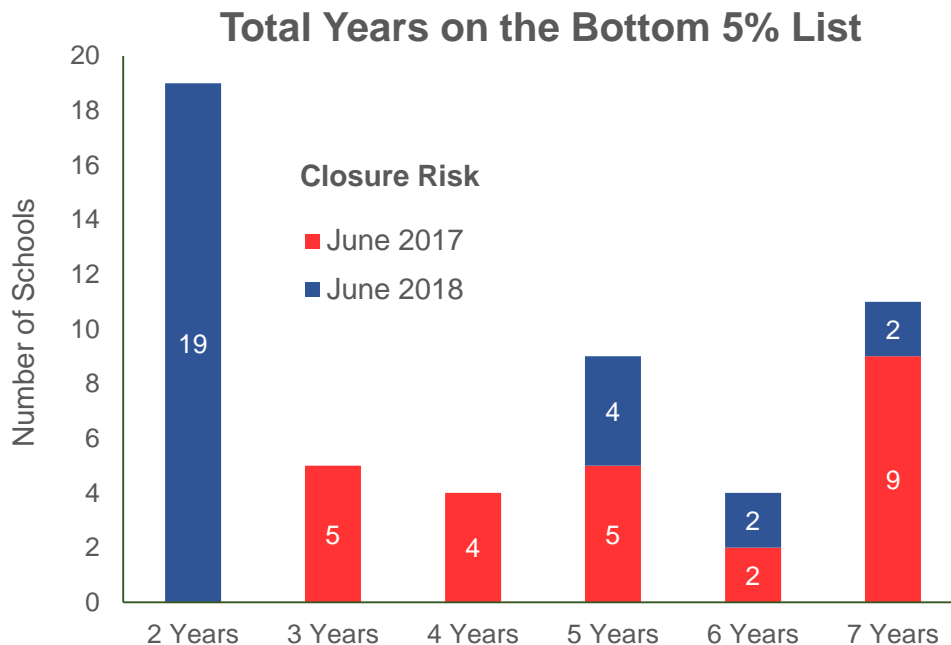
Percent of Schools

Legend:
- Bottom 5% (14, 15, & 16)
- Bottom 5% (15, & 16)
- Bottom 5% (16)
- Not Bottom 5% in 16
- Not ranked

Cities (x-axis): Detroit, Benton Harbor, Saginaw, Kalamazoo, Pontiac, Muskegon, Eastpointe, River Rouge, Flint, Grand Rapids, Lansing, Oak Park, Warren, Redford, Port Huron, Hazel Park, Southgate

Number of Schools in the Bottom 5%

	Detroit	Benton Harbor	Saginaw	Kalamazoo	Pontiac	Muskegon	Eastpointe	River Rouge	Flint	Grand Rapids	Lansing	Oak Park	Warren	Redford	Port Huron	Hazel Park	Southgate
Bottom 5% (14, 15, & 16)	25	3	3	2	2	1	1	1									
Bottom 5% (15 & 16)	27	1	1						3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Bottom 5% (16)	16	2		1		1	1		2	3	2	2	1				
Other	99	3	28	34	12	32	5	2	29	98	30	4	31	13	10	4	7
No TTB Rank	32	2	16	12	3	8	2	1	15	30	13	6	8	9	3	7	2
Total	199	11	48	49	17	42	9	4	49	132	46	13	41	23	14	12	10
% Bottom 5%	34%	55%	8%	6%	12%	5%	22%	25%	10%	3%	7%	23%	5%	4%	7%	8%	10%

Note: cities are sorted by the number of schools in in the Bottom 5% list in 2014, 2015 & 2016, then by the number of schools in the Bottom 5% list in 2014 & 2015, then by the number of schools in the Bottom 5% list in 2016.
Source: Top-to-Bottom Rankings (MISchoolData.org), SRO Website

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In Detroit, approximately 27,000 students attend schools identified in the Bottom 5% that may be closed in coming years.

There are 52 Detroit area schools that are at risk of closing over the next two years and many have been on the Bottom 5% list for multiple years. While all Michigan schools are subject to 1280c, Public Act 192 introduced stricter requirements for community district schools. If a community district school is on the Bottom 5% list for the immediately 3 preceding years, the SRO shall close the school unless the closure would create an unreasonable hardship. Both laws are too broad and blunt to achieve the intended outcome.

Total Years on the Bottom 5% List

Closure Risk
- June 2017
- June 2018

Years	June 2017	June 2018
2 Years		19
3 Years	5	
4 Years	4	
5 Years	5	4
6 Years	2	2
7 Years	9	2

Y-axis: Number of Schools (0–20)

Bottom 5% for 3 Preceding Years
(Potential Closures in 2017)

Elementary-Middle Schools: 15
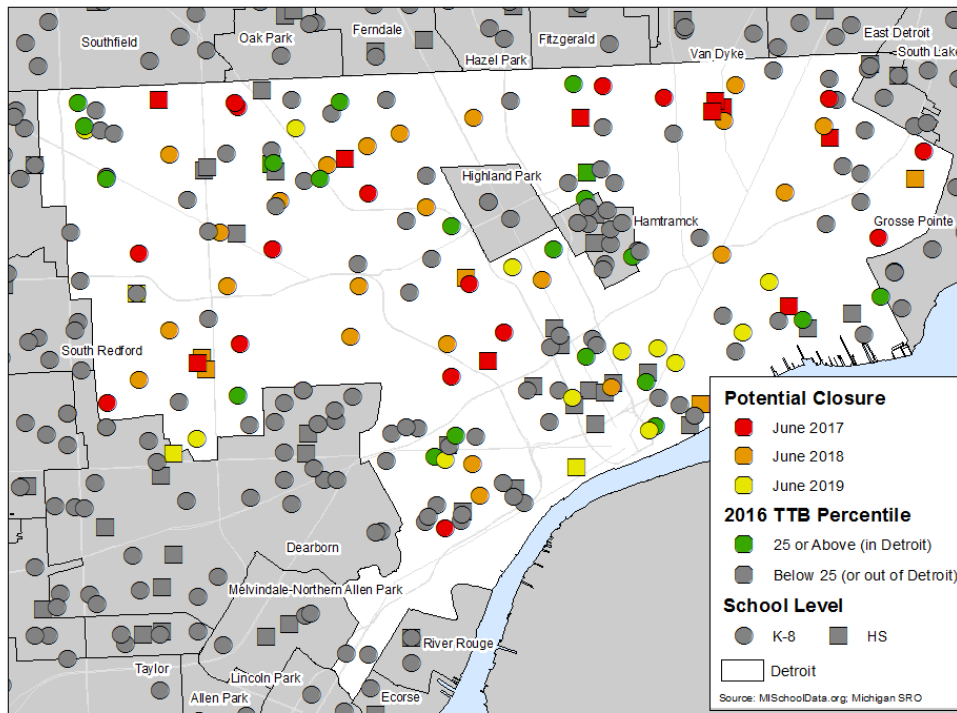
High Schools: 10

Bottom 5% for 2 Preceding Years
(Potential Closures in 2018)

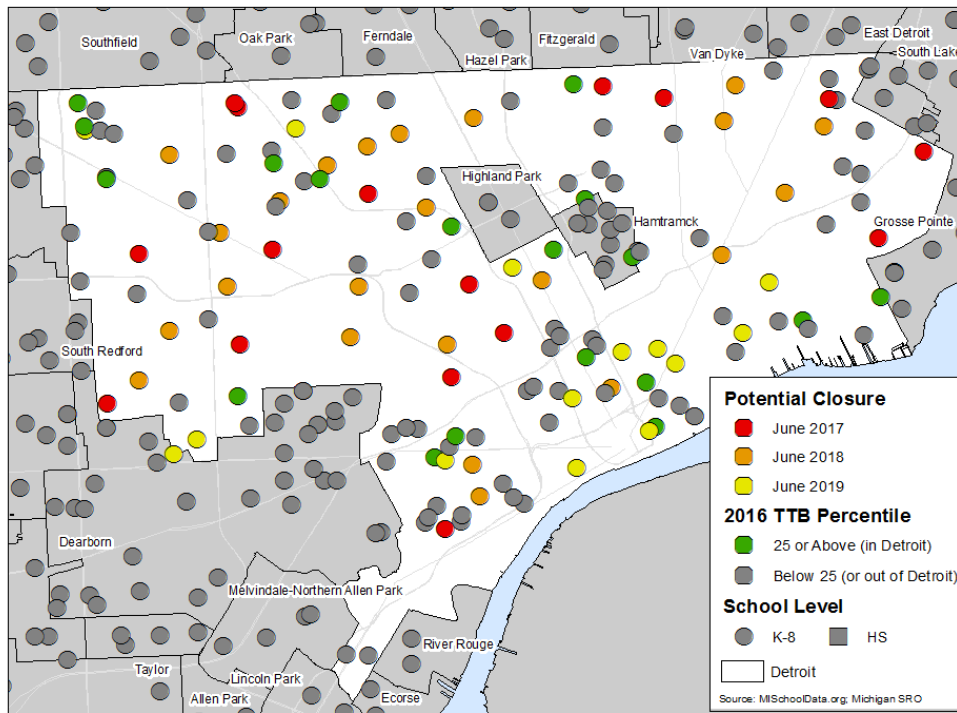Elementary-Middle Schools: 20

High Schools: 5

Both: 2

Source: Top-to-Bottom Rankings (MISchoolData.org), SRO Website

- Most of the potential closures in Detroit are located in neighborhoods that lack viable alternatives. Families would be forced to move or travel long distances to find a school option.

- Closing a school not only deprives students of an educational option, but also shutters a pillar of stability within our communities.

- The SRO identifies quality options as schools at or above the 25th percentile. However, recommending districts that are 30 miles away and don't accept Detroit students is unacceptable.

Source: Learning Summit

- Looking at elementary-middle schools, the potential closure map shows the impact of future closures on Detroit's youngest students.

- If the cycle of closures continues, families would be forced to uproot their children year after year in search of a new school to attend.

- Many of the higher-performing schools in Detroit are far away from the potential closures, meaning children as young as 5 years old would have to travel miles on a bus to a new school.

Potential high school closures are mostly near the northeast and northwest ends of Detroit, where there are few other options.
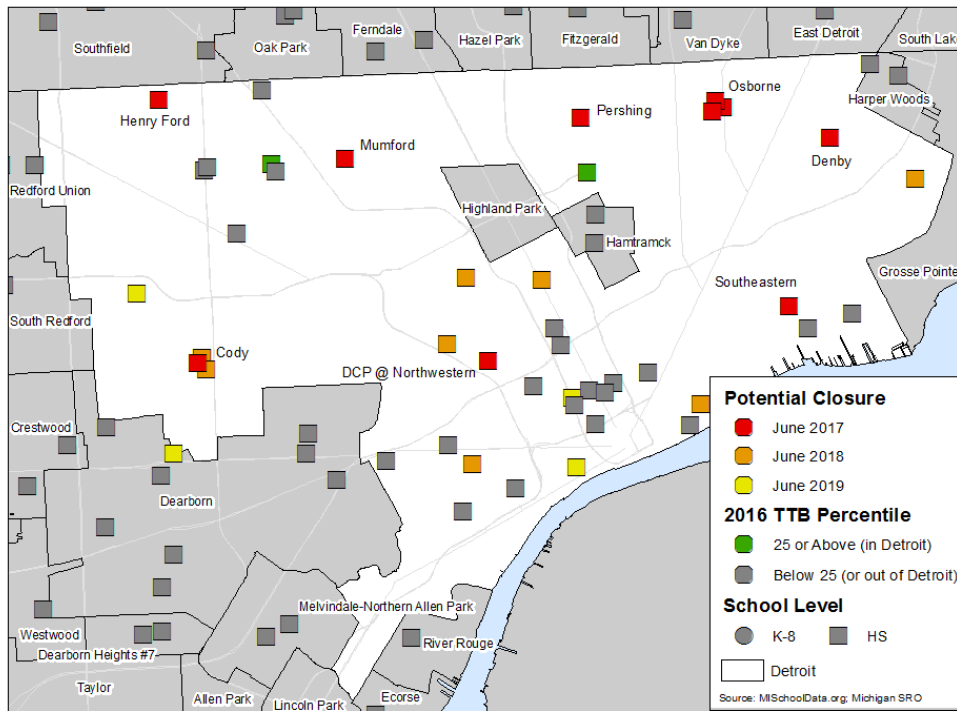
- Students from northeast Detroit would have no viable options and would need to travel upwards of 4 miles for an available option. All nearby schools are either at capacity or are up for potential closure.

- The only Detroit high schools above the 25th percentile are non open enrollment schools that are already at capacity.

Source: Learning Summit

A Framework for Statewide Accountability

Design and key features of effective state accountability systems

An effective accountability system sets clear performance expectations and provides tiered supports based on district needs.

Key Features

Clearly define levels of performance and differentiated accountability and supports: Define clear levels of expected performance based on a classification system (e.g., A-F grade scale) that is used to determine differentiated accountability (e.g., state-initiated interventions) and supports for districts and schools.

Based on multiple measures that include both qualitative and quantitative indicators: Utilize a comprehensive set of measures that is based on both leading and lagging indicators, both qualitative and quantitative. (i.e., school quality reviews, surveys, and college success measures)

Allow sufficient time for schools to improve performance: Give sufficient time for turnaround efforts to take root – typically over 3 to 5 years. State-led interventions should only be employed when sufficient time is given and no other options are available.

Provide timely and consistent monitoring and feedback: Release accountability results and progress monitoring and feedback in a timely and consistent manner. Ensure that feedback is meaningful and easily understood by leaders and educators.

Remain consistent and unchanged over time: Ensure that framework sets consistent benchmarks from year to year and key inputs, such as state assessments, remain consistent.

State education agency retains authority to intervene with a range of interventions: Retain authority to employ district and school takeover as well as state-local collaborations supported through partnership agreements.

Successful Innovation Zones

Looking to the Memphis iZone (Shelby County Schools) and the Springfield Empowerment Zone (Springfield Public Schools)

Case Study: Shelby County Schools IZone

As of 2016, seven out of eighteen iZone schools have made it off the priority list and eleven iZone schools increased student test scores by double-digits. A 2015 report by Vanderbilt noted that the iZone is having positive, statistically significant, and meaningful effects on student achievement across all subjects.

Purpose

The Shelby County iZone was created as a result of Memphis being home to 69 (80%) of Tennessee's priority schools. iZone schools that remain under the control of the local school district, but are given greater autonomy to implement reforms in hopes of improving performance.

Structure and Core Design Elements

- Hire highly effective leaders and empower them to choose the most effective teachers;

- Extend the learning day for students;

- Provide "no fault" coaching and additional supports to help teachers improve their practice (Relay GSE);

- Deliver dedicated central support under purview of the superintendent;

- Invest in developing talent locally through local and federal grants; (i.e., Memphis Education Fund and TeacherTown)

- Create strategic partnerships to support student achievement;

- iZone programs cost approximately $600K per school per year, which includes talent development and technical assistance (Uncommon Schools); and

- The program was initially funded by federal grants, and is now continued through a combination of the school district's budget and local philanthropy

Source: Shelby County Public Schools, Memphis Education Fund

Springfield, Massachusetts provides an example of helping persistently low-performing schools improve through local partnership.

District + **Teacher Union** + **Partner** = **Partnership Zone**

District

Provides facilities and key operational supports like transportation and human resources, while delegating staffing, curriculum, and budget use

Grants SEZP Board direct control of a portion of per-student funding

Ensures that accountability frameworks are clear and consistently applied

Teacher Union

Negotiates CBA allowing for working conditions to be set at the school level by the principal, and promotes teacher voice through the Teacher Leadership Team

Partner

Provides technical assistance, additional funding, and capacity as necessary.

Partnership Zone

Governed by its own board, which is comprised of representatives from the district, state, non-profit advisor, and SEZP.

There is proposed legislation that would create "Innovation Partnership Zones" in Massachusetts, modeled after the Springfield Empowerment Zone.

Case Study: Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership

Springfield was modeled on the Lawrence Public Schools turnaround, which has shown significant results. Ten out of the original twenty-eight LPS schools have now reached Level 1 status, the highest level, up from just two schools in 2012 and the graduation rate between 2011 and 2015 improved from 52% to 72% and the dropout rate was cut roughly in half.

Purpose

The Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership was a response to the state's categorization of various Springfield schools into Level 4 of its state accountability system – indicating that they are chronically low-performing. It was created as a locally-led alternative to prevent state takeover efforts that had occurred in other cities in Massachusetts.

Structure and Core Design Elements

- The elected school board authorized the creation of a separate governing board – made up of local officials, outside partners, and school board members – to oversee the zone and create a leaner, more responsive central office;

- Schools remain part of the local district;

- Shift more resources (85% of available funds) and decision-making authority to the school level*;

- Ensure all schools have great leaders and teachers;

- Turnaround model that allows leaders to hire their own teaching staff;

- Frequent data cycles to monitor progress and provide feedback;

- Expand the school day and increase student engagement through enrichment opportunities; and

- Minimal added cost, as zone schools operate within the per student allocation they are provided

Note: * Excluding services paid for through dedicated funds, like school food and transportation.
Source: Springfield Empowerment Zone

Innovation zones create space for school-level autonomy, paired with intensive support and supervision.

Innovative practices shared by zones across the country can be categorized under the following features.

Key Features

- *Increase autonomy and resources:* Push additional resources and decision-making authority to the school level;

- *Hire exceptional leaders and teachers:* Hire highly effective leaders or leaders with the potential to be great and empower them to hire the most effective teachers;

- *Build capacity of leaders and teachers:* Invest in developing talent locally using local and federal grants and provide additional support and technical assistance to help leaders and teachers improve

- *Extend learning time:* Extend the learning day and year for students;

- *Deliver dedicated support:* Typically operate entirely within the existing public school district and can be supported by structures established outside of the district (SEZP) or by a separate and dedicated team within the district to provide instructional and operations support (Memphis iZone);

- *Establish partnerships:* Create strategic partnerships with those organizations and entities that are positioned to help the district and support student achievement.

Setting Conditions for Turnaround in Michigan

Key policy and practice levers

Michigan can be among the first states to adopt a comprehensive accountability system that aligns to best practices.

- **Develop a comprehensive accountability system that is meaningful to leaders and educators**: A comprehensive statewide accountability system must be based on multiple measures (quantitative and qualitative, allow sufficient time to show improvement, clearly define tiered interventions and supports, and provide actionable data to school leaders and educators.

- **Adopt a system that leverages multiple intervention strategies**: The school reform entity must have the authority to employ state-initiated interventions that range from district and school takeover to entering into partnership agreements.

  - The MDE has already begun to adopt this best practice, which includes leveraging local supports (e.g., the union, business leaders, philanthropic organizations, etc.).

- **State-initiated interventions must require best practice features**: Agreements must include the following best practice to allow districts the flexibility to implement effective turnaround strategies. Features include: shifting additional resources and autonomy to schools, investment in talent recruitment/retention/development, extended learning time, separate, collective bargaining agreements, timely and frequent data reporting, and dedicated support teams.

- **Leverage ESSA flexibilities to provide additional resources to lowest performing schools**: ESSA allows for states to set aside additional Title funds to support school improvement and teacher/leader development. Funding strategies must be in alignment and support of the accountability system.

Appendix: Massachusetts Proposed Legislation

Proposed bill to allow for "Innovation Partnership Zones"

Massachusetts is looking to empowerment zones as a viable alternative to stake takeover and state-imposed closures.

Massachusetts legislators have filed a bill to permit the creation of "Innovation Partnership Zones" (IPZ) in certain districts based on the Springfield model. The IPZ can be initiated by one of two routes:

- By a **district** that has one or more schools in the Bottom 20% (Level 3) OR

- By **the commissioner**, in a district that has (a) one or more Level 4 or Level 5 schools or (b) is a Level 5 district, following a period of receivership.

Key Questions	Initiated by District	Initiated by Commissioner
Who approves the formation of an IPZ?	The school board, superintendent, or union, subject to approval of the school board.	The commissioner recommends initiating the process to Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). BESE votes to authorize.
Who makes up the board of the IPZ?	The board of the IPZ must have 5-9 members, a majority of whom are not elected, appointed or employed by the municipality. At least three must live in the IPZ community. No requirement that elected or appointed officials are appointed to the board.	This board has the same "district-initiated" setup including no requirement that any municipal officials or educators be appointed and a mandate that a majority of the members NOT be elected/appointed officials or employed by the municipality.
How is the IPZ board formed?	A screening committee (SC) made up of the board chair, superintendent, and local union leadership must approve with a two-thirds vote.	The commissioner appoints the board.
Who is the primary party the board enters into agreements with?	The board and SC create an MOU. The board must "engage" district and community representatives to develop a comprehensive plan (incl. MOU, CBA modifications, etc.). The board and union negotiate any modifications to the CBA. The board submits the comprehensive plan to the commissioner for approval.	The board develops an MOU with the commissioner. The board and union negotiate any modifications to the CBA. Where unanimous agreement is not reached, the commissioner has unilateral authority to impose changes to any agreement.